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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: December 06, 2007

Teacher Training Key to Education

**¶1.** Education Minister Claudia Schmied of the Social Democrats (SPOe) said one of the keys to raising standards in education is to improve teacher training and review the selection process for those wishing to enter the profession. She was speaking on Austrian television after the publication of this year's international Pisa survey by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Austria achieved average results among the 30 OECD countries, and a number of weaknesses, for example in reading, were highlighted by the study. Minister Schmied stressed that she wants to see a more rigorous and selective approach to accepting applicants for the teaching profession. Responding to Education Minister Claudia Schmied's proposal to raise education standards by improving teacher training and reviewing the selection process for those wishing to enter the profession, education expert Michael Schratz suggested a unified training program for teachers of the various school types in Austria at the university level. Speaking to semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung, he emphasized that it "would be an insane degree of luxury to have parallel education curricula depending on the school type for prospective teachers of students from identical age groups. This would also create two classes of teachers," he argued. Schratz also argued in favor of a selection process for prospective teachers: "It make sense to test whether the candidates are suited for the job before the beginning of university training."

"Europe Needs More Immigrants"

**¶2.** ... said EU Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini, advertising European Union plans for the introduction of a so-called "Blue Card." However, his concept, similar to the US Green Card, of a permit granting residence and work rights to immigrants in order to bring more skilled workers to Europe, has been met with massive criticism from some EU countries, among them Austria and Germany. Frattini argues that his concept of organized immigration is to make Europe more attractive for urgently needed highly skilled workers. EU employment and interior ministers are meeting in Brussels today to discuss the issue of immigration. ORF radio in its early morning news program Morgenjournal quotes EU Justice Commissioner Frattini as underscoring the need in the coming years to admit immigrants, particularly highly skilled workers, to EU countries. Pushing for the introduction of a so-called "Blue Card" to facilitate monitored and controlled immigration, Frattini responded to criticism from Austria and Germany on the issue: "I've explained to my friends in Austria and Germany that there is no need for them to be concerned. The Blue Card is a tool they can choose to employ or not. If Austria says 'we do not need additional engineers,' then the Blue Card will have no consequences for Austria. We are not going to decide in

Brussels how many immigrants Austria needs, or Germany, or Italy, or Lithuania for that matter." Meanwhile, the Austrian Chamber of Economics has presented an estimate warning that by 2009, Austria may be up to 50,000 skilled workers short. The Chamber has therefore criticized the Blue Card as "not ambitious enough," ORF radio notes.

#### Key Hearing on Guantanamo Inmates

¶3. The US Supreme Court has begun considering whether Guantanamo Bay inmates should be able to contest their detention in US civilian courts. Two cases are challenging the removal by Congress of the "habeas corpus" right of detainees under the US Constitution to be heard by an independent judge. The Military Commissions Act (MCA) passed in 2006 removed the right of habeas corpus and set up commissions to try detainees who were not US citizens. Now the two test cases challenging the MCA brought by Lakhdar Boumediene, an Algerian arrested in Bosnia in 2001, and Fawzi al-Odah, a Kuwaiti seized in Pakistan in 2002, have been consolidated into one and brought on behalf of 37 foreign nationals who remain among the 305 detainees at Guantanamo Bay. If the court rules in their favor, indefinite detention of inmates under military control could be declared unlawful, according to ORF online news.

#### US President Calls on Iran to "Come Clean"

¶4. US President George Bush has said that Iran should reveal the full extent of its nuclear program, or risk further international isolation. The "Iranian nuclear issue continues to be a problem that needs to be addressed by the international community," President Bush underscored. Iran still had "more to explain" about its past actions, and "must cease uranium enrichment," the US President stressed. Meanwhile, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called the US intelligence assessment released on Monday, which suggests that Tehran had halted a nuclear weapons program in 2003, a great victory for Iran: "This report is announcing a victory for the Iranian nation in the nuclear issue against all international powers," he said in a televised speech. The assessment had been a "fatal blow" to those who had filled the world for several years with threats, stress and anxiety, Ahmadinejad claimed. Reporting on the recent developments in Iran, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung runs the front-page headline "Moscow and Beijing are putting the brakes on Bush." The recently published US intelligence estimate, which argues that in all likelihood Iran has not been working on its nuclear arms program since 2003, makes the US call for new UN sanctions against Tehran questionable, according to China and Russia. Analyzing these developments, the daily's foreign affairs writer Rainer Mayerhofer says in a commentary entitled "George Bush's new dilemma:" Iran feels vindicated by the report, and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sees a 'victory of the people against the world powers.' Nevertheless, George Bush intends to stick to his Iran course and keep all options on the table. Bush's allies Britain and France are backing him up in this. Israel, which feels threatened by potential Iranian nuclear weapons, does not believe in the intelligence reports at all. However, it will be virtually impossible for Bush to get Russia and China to join in new sanctions against Iran. True, Putin has appealed to Iran to stop uranium enrichment, but Russia wants to include the new findings into the consultations about sanctions. And China also sees a change in the situation that needs reflecting on."

Kilner